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Security Council

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Letter dated 25 June 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to you a letter dated 25 June 2015 from the representative of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (see annex).

I would be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Raimonda **Murmokaitė**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 25 June 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On behalf of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, it is with grave concern and growing outrage that I draw your attention to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria and the worsening violence perpetrated by Syrian regime forces, including through the systematic and illegal use of indiscriminate aerial weapons.

Three years after the signing of the Action Group for Syria Final Communiqué, the crisis in Syria is no closer to a resolution. Assad's forces continue to kill, maim and rape civilians with impunity, and the savagery, depravity and scale of their atrocities only continue to grow. As a result, May was the deadliest month yet in the Syrian conflict, accounting for the deaths of close to 7,000 people, more than 1,200 of whom were civilians.

Three hundred civilians are now killed each week in Syria. The overwhelming majority of these deaths are caused by the Syrian regime's indiscriminate aerial bombardment. Regime helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft accounted for two thirds of all civilian deaths in May and June 2015, according to the Violations Documentation Centre in Syria.

Aleppo governorate has been particularly hard hit by the Syrian regime's indiscriminate aerial assaults. In May alone, more than 200 civilians were killed by regime aircraft across Aleppo. Among the most horrific air attacks launched by Syrian regime forces in Aleppo was a lethal barrel-bomb attack conducted on 3 May that targeted the Seif al-Dawla teaching centre. As students were sitting their final exams, regime helicopters pounded the teaching centre with explosive barrel bombs. These attacks resulted in seven deaths, including those of four children and a teacher. An even more lethal aerial attack took place just four weeks later. On 30 May, the regime again struck Aleppo's residential marketplace in the town of Al-Bab with barrel bombs, killing more than 70 civilians and injuring dozens more. Just this past week, on 22 June, Syrian regime barrel bombs struck a mosque in Aleppo, killing 10 worshippers as they observed Ramadan.

In addition to Aleppo, regime air forces have targeted Idlib, rural Damascus, eastern Ghouta, Deir ez-Zor and Palmyra/Tadmur, often, albeit not exclusively, using barrel bombs. These indiscriminate barrel-bomb attacks have been systematic and repeated and wilfully designed to maximize civilian casualties and spread fear among innocent men, women and children. As the Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic stated in Geneva on 12 March 2015, "the timing and duration of the attacks demonstrate that the aim of the Government's campaign of barrel-bombing was to terrorize the civilian population present in the areas attacked, with the clear message that no civilian was safe anywhere at any time of the day or night".

Assad's systematic use of barrel bombs violates international humanitarian law and constitutes the war crime of targeting civilians, which is prohibited under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and by Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2209 (2015), as well as 2139 (2014), which stipulates that "all parties immediately cease all attacks against civilians, as well as the indiscriminate employment of

weapons in populated areas, including shelling and aerial bombardment, such as the use of barrel bombs ..."

Barrel bombs are by far the most lethal form of the Syrian regime's attacks on civilians. They are not, however, the only form of lethal attack perpetrated by Syrian regime forces. Assad's troops continue to besiege, detain, torture and kill Syrian civilians with impunity, while systematically obstructing the delivery of humanitarian aid to hundreds of thousands of civilians across the country (see enclosure). These crimes can and must be stopped.

The atrocities in Syria are untenable. After more tha.. 220,000 deaths, half the population displaced and an equal number in desperate need of aid, it is imperative that the Security Council take action to stop the killing in Syria. On behalf of my fellow countrymen and women, I therefore ask that the Council act with urgency to stop the barrel-bomb attacks in Syria, including by authorizing the only instrument capable of stopping Assad's helicopters from launching their brutal aerial attacks: a no-fly zone.

A no-fly zone would stop the leading killer of Syrian civilians, Assad's barrel bombs, by ensuring that all helicopters were grounded. It would enable humanitarian aid to reach more parts of Syria with greater frequency. It would deprive the Syrian regime of the primary delivery mechanism used to deploy chlorine gas against innocent civilians. And it would create the conditions needed to compel the Syrian regime to engage in viable negotiations.

In his sixteenth report on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/468), the Secretary-General called on the Security Council "to take urgent action" to stop the atrocities in Syria. "Lack of action", he warned, "will throw the country deeper into chaos and deprive the country of a peaceful and prosperous future".

It is vital that members of the Security Council heed the Secretary-General's warning. By imposing a no-fly zone, Member States would alleviate my people's suffering. They would stop Assad's use of chemical weapons. Most importantly, they would save the lives of civilians. Member States have the capacity to impose a no-fly zone safely and without fear of military escalation. On behalf of my people, I appeal to you to find the moral and political courage needed to impose a no-fly zone and abandon the tragic course of inaction, which has cost so many lives in my country.

(*Signed*) Najib **Ghadbian**
Special Representative to the United Nations
National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces

Enclosure

Syrian regime non-compliance with Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), May-June 2015

Violations of human rights and international humanitarian law

1. The Syrian regime continued to violate human rights and international humanitarian law throughout the reporting period, including by killing and maiming civilians, attacking schools and hospitals, engaging in arbitrary arrest, detention, torture and the ill treatment of women and children. As a result of these violations, May was the deadliest month yet in the Syrian conflict, accounting for the deaths of 6,657 people, of which at least 1,285 were civilians, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Attacks against civilians and indiscriminate employment of weapons in populated areas

2. By far the greatest killer of Syrian civilians throughout the reporting period was indiscriminate aerial bombardment. According to the Violations Documentation Centre in Syria, no less than two thirds (66 per cent) of all civilian deaths during the month of May were caused by indiscriminate aerial bombardment. That proportion looks to be on par with the statistics of June 2015: as of 23 June, over 60 per cent of all civilian deaths were attributable to indiscriminate aerial bombardment.

3. Once again, barrel bombs were the primary delivery mechanism used to deploy chemical weapons against innocent civilians throughout the reporting period. Table 1 provides a summary of the chemical weapons attacks perpetrated by Syrian regime forces since 1 May 2015, as monitored by the Syrian Civil Defence teams.

Table 1
Chemical weapons attacks, May-June 2015

Date	*Description of attack*	*Location*	*Casualties*
1 May	1 chlorine barrel bomb dropped by regime	Al Nayyrab	12 injured
2 May	2 chlorine barrel bombs dropped by regime	Saraqeb	100 injured
3 May	4 chlorine barrel bombs dropped by regime	Eblin Kinsafra (Jabal al Zawieyah) Jozef (Jabal al Zawieyah) Jobar	34+ injured
7 May	3 chlorine barrel bombs dropped by regime	Kafar Battiekh Al Janoudiah	175+ injured
15 May	2 chlorine barrel bombs dropped by regime	Mishimshan Ain Alsawda	2 deaths, 22 injured
16 May	1 chlorine barrel bomb dropped by regime	Mishimshan	10 injured
17 May	2 chlorine barrel bombs dropped by regime	Mishimshan Kastan	40 injured

Date	*Description of attack*	*Location*	*Casualties*
19 May	3 chlorine barrel bombs dropped by regime	Bashieriah Mishimshan Al Shougr	40+ injured
7 June	3 chlorine barrel bombs dropped by regime	Saraqeb Kensafra	no injuries
9 June	2 chlorine barrel bombs dropped by regime	Bashieriah	unknown

Attacks against medical facilities and schools

4. May was the worst month yet for attacks on medical facilities in Syria, with 15 attacks on 14 medical facilities and 10 medical personnel killed. According to Physicians for Human Rights, Syrian regime forces were responsible for all of the attacks in May. Eight of the attacks were perpetrated via barrel bombs launched from Syrian regime helicopters, while seven attacks were conducted with rockets and missiles. As of January 2015, no less than 95 per cent of the Syrian regime's attacks on medical facilities and medical personnel were conducted through fixed-wing and helicopter aircraft. Among the medical facilities and schools targeted by Syrian regime forces were the following:

Table 2
Attacks on medical facilities and schools

Date	*Facility*	*Location*	*Description*	*Medical personnel affected*
3 May	Seif al-Dawla teaching centre	Aleppo	Barrel-bomb attack	7 deaths
7 May	Hama Central Hospital	Idlib	Barrel-bomb attack	1 death, 5 injured
13 May	Al-Quds Hospital	Aleppo	Barrel-bomb attack	1 death
16 May	Hama Central Hospital	Idlib	Missile attack	2 injured
23 May	Qastun Health Centre	Hama	Barrel-bomb attack	1 death
24 May	Kafr Zita Specialty Hospital	Hama	Barrel-bomb attack	1 death

Sieges of populated areas

5. The Syrian regime continued its sieges of eastern Ghouta and Darayya, besieging over 163,500 and 4,000 people, respectively, and denying humanitarian agencies access to civilians in need. The regime's siege of Darayya has now been ongoing for close to three years.

Arbitrary detention and torture

6. The Syrian regime continued to detain, torture and kill Syrians in prisons throughout the country. The Counter-terrorism Court, established in 2012, prosecuted human rights defenders, whom it accused of engaging in pro-opposition activities. The Violations Documentation Centre in Syria estimates that, since 1 May

2015, no fewer than 100 Syrian detainees have been tortured to death or executed in Syrian regime prisons.

7. On 13 May, the verdict for human rights activists Mazen Darwish, Director of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression; Hani Zitani, a university professor; and Hussein Ghreir was delayed for the tenth time. All three were last seen on 6 May in Adhra prison, after which they were transferred to an undisclosed location.